

World Food Crisis



Over the past year world food prices have rocketed, forcing some people to suggest that the world is facing a global food crisis. However, this food crisis has been ongoing for many decades with close to 800 million living in hunger. The recent surge in food prices has only intensified an ongoing suffering, which has sparked riots in a number of countries. There were two days of rioting in Egypt over the doubling of prices of basic foods in a year and protests in Italy, Haiti and India to name but a few.



Did you know that 1 billion people live on less than \$2 per day and over 840 million people live in hunger?



Supermarkets and shops in the UK throw away more than £350 million worth of food a year, most of it perfectly edible!

For a moment, let's look at the problem of hunger....

Global food supplies have more than doubled in the past 40 years, surpassing the rate of population growth. Counting only grains and cereals there is enough food in the world to give everyone over 3,000 calories per day. When you consider that the average person is recommended to consume between 2,000-2,500 calories per day, there's plenty of food for all. So why is there a world food crisis and why are people hungry?

People often assume that hunger exists because of famines, droughts, there are too many people to feed, it doesn't rain in Africa, or the world cannot produce enough food. However, the fact is that it's a question about how resources are shared among the world's people. People are hungry because they lack the money or land to be able to feed themselves.

Increased food has not resulted in increased access to food globally. Therefore, it is not food that is in short supply. Rather, it is not shared fairly. When we consider out of 100 people, that 13 people are hungry while 10 are obese. Consequently, our current food crisis is a matter of Justice.

But what has led to this World Food Crisis?

Without doubt, food supply has been under some strain in recent years due to climate change, biofuel production, oil price inflation and population increases. However, unfair trading practices have eroded the agricultural sector in poorer countries over decades, leaving people more dependent on an unstable global market. However, before we consider the root causes of this instability, let us look at the contributing factors.

Climate change is having a significant impact on agricultural production, especially in poorer regions where drought and famine are becoming increasingly the norm. Rice production has been almost completely decimated in Australia following the recent 6 year drought. The result is bigger competition for fertile land.

The push to produce biofuels as an alternative to oil and gas and other hydrocarbons is putting pressure on food supplies. In the U.S. farmers are receiving subsidies for growing biofuels. This is luring them away from producing traditional grains for food consumption, which is serious when you consider that the US is one of the main grain producers in the world. Now over 25% of US corn is used for biofuels. When we consider that less than 10 years ago the same amount had entered the world food market, it all seems a bit sudden!

The spike in oil prices has pushed up the costs involved in farming, such as fertiliser and transporting goods from farms, to markets, to shipping it abroad.

With large scale farmers in the U.S and other developed countries converting to biofuel production, and climate change affecting food production elsewhere, it is little wonder food supply has become somewhat limited and prices have risen sharply.



Did you know that China's population is over 1.3bn? India's is 1.13bn.

Added to this pressure, billions of people are buying ever-greater amounts of food, especially in India and China. With the biggest populations on the planet, topping one billion each, India and China combined represent over one third of the world's total population. As their economies have improved and the incomes of many people have increased there is now a bigger demand in these countries for more food, especially meat. An increased demand for meat results in an increased demand for animal feed. Therefore, it drives up the demand for grain. As demand goes up, the price goes up!

In response to this situation, developed countries, who produce much of the world's food, have exacerbated the problem by increasing food prices in developing countries through export taxes, bans or other restrictions. Unfortunately however, these unfair trading practices are nothing new and have ultimately lead to our current crisis.

Richer countries have continued to place high taxes on imports from the Developing World whilst giving farming subsidies to farmers in the Developed World. Often, products from the Developed World are 'dumped' at low prices in poorer countries. With limited income, people will always buy the cheaper good. This seriously damages local farmers who depend solely on their produce for income, forcing many into bankruptcy. In the case of many of the world's poorest countries imbalances in trade rules are actually aggravating poverty and undermining aid.

Despite the pressure on developing countries to open their markets up, developed countries continue to protect their markets. Imbalances in global trade rules have their roots in the power imbalances between rich and poor countries. On paper, global trade rules are negotiated by all members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), but in practice decisions are made by the powerful few. The 'free market' is equal but some countries are more equal than others!

We live in a commercial world....



Prices have increased globally by 40% on average since last summer!

So how has the business world reacted? Unfortunately, the actions of stock brokers and spectators on the stock exchange have further accelerated food prices as they buy and sell commodities like wheat and rice at increasing prices. This has led to a feeling of instability in the market.

In order to prevent serious consequences in their own countries many countries are now restricting food exports. In India, a country that used to produce much of its food, they have restricted exports so that its own citizens won't go hungry. And what about the biggest grain producer? China has started to curb overseas sales of wheat, corn, and rice by issuing export permits.

Added to this, global stockpiles of staples like corn, wheat and rice are at their lowest levels in years and prices are at their highest. All things considered, we've got a serious situation on our hands. Of course, for the poorest people in the world, the price increases have been disastrous. Poor people in the Developing World spend 75% of their income on food, in comparison with Irish people who spend about 10% of their income on it. Trócaire's work in many of its partner countries has been seriously complicated by the current food crisis.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) each person has a basic right to food. It states,

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of this family, including food..."

The reality is that many people's basic rights are not respected and this is unjust. This is why Trócaire strives to work for a just world, so that people's human rights are respected.

When we talk about a world food crisis what is core to the crisis is trade and unfair trade practices on a global scale. Because of the inter-linked nature of the factors of hunger, you can be sure that the world food crisis will in turn cause more debt, more conflicts, more health problems, more famines, more poverty and more poor government decisions as they struggle to react to a growing danger. The World Food Crisis will not disappear quickly!



Price riots in Haiti killed 4 people & 40 were left dead after riots in Cameroon!

So what are world leaders saying about it?

The UN's top humanitarian official, Sir John Holmes, told a conference in Dubai that escalating prices would trigger protests and riots in vulnerable nations. He said food scarcity and soaring fuel prices would compound the damaging effects of global warming. He stated that, "the security implications [of the food crisis] should also not be underestimated as food riots are already being reported across the globe". He continued, "Current food price trends are likely to increase sharply both the incidence and depth of food insecurity."

He added that the biggest challenge to humanitarian work, such as work Trócaire undertakes, is climate change, which has doubled the number of disasters from an average of 200 a year to 400 a year in the past two decades.

Furthermore Josette Sheeran, director of the UN World Food Programme, has said that, "We are seeing a new face of hunger. We are seeing more urban hunger than ever before. We are seeing food on the shelves but people being unable to afford it."

Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank, said "many more people will suffer and starve" unless the US, Europe, Japan and other rich countries provide funds. He said prices of all staple food had risen by 80% in three years, and that 33 countries faced unrest because of the price rises.



Finally, what can we do to help?

Plan an awareness raising campaign for **World Food Day**- October 16th. This could involve a two minute talk/collage/ newspaper article on the issue. The campaign could take place in your school but also in your community.



Become a **Fairtrade school**. Ways that schools can make a difference are: buying Fairtrade products; running Fairtrade awareness events or competitions; organizing a sale of Fairtrade products in local shops; or giving the Fairtrade catering list to a local coffee shop or hotel. Visit www.fairtrade.ie for more information.



Go Green! With rising temperatures negatively impacting on food production in the Developing World, we all have a responsibility to lessen our energy consumption. Complete the 7 steps to becoming a green school through An Taisce Programme. See www.greenschoolsireland.org



Why are food prices rising?

Aim: To discuss and explore some of the possible reasons leading to the food crisis.

Top Tip: In a whole group setting, ask the students what they understand of each of the possible reasons given before separating them into smaller groups.

Instructions: Cut out a set of cards for each small group of 6. In these groups, ask students to present an argument for each of the possible reasons with each pupil taking a card. Finally, ask the group to come to a consensus on which possible reasons they believe to be most responsible for the food crisis. They can be ranked from top to bottom, top being the strongest reason. This should take 30 minutes.

Walking Gallery: This could be further developed by allowing pupils to view the other groups' order of ranking which could take 5- 10 minutes, depending on how many groups there are.

Climate Change



Bio-fuels



Free market



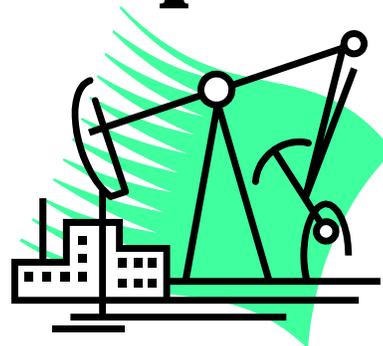
Unfair trade



Changing diets in emerging markets



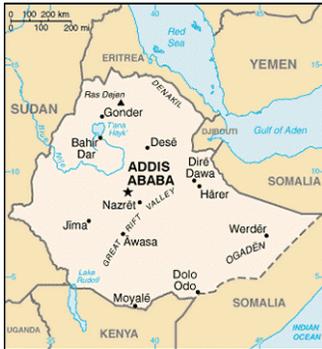
Rising OIL prices



World Food Crisis Case Study

To understand what the food crisis means in practical terms for the poorest countries, let's examine how it has affected some of our partners and projects overseas.

Ethiopia



There is a seven year gap between the Ethiopian calendar and the Gregorian calendar resulting from alternate calculations of the date of the annunciation of Jesus Christ!



Ethiopia has 13 months in its calendar and is known as the country of 13 months of sunshine!



Adi Godona from Bulbul in Guji lost 15 cattle out of the 30 she had before the drought.

Ethiopia is an incredibly diverse country in terms of its geography, people, culture and wildlife. It is Africa's oldest independent country and one of its poorest. However, it is unique in Africa as it is almost the only country in the continent to have avoided colonization, except for a brief occupation by Italy between 1936-1940. As a result its culture has remained intact and it retains its own distinctive languages and script, its own food and drink, its own church and saints and even its own calendar and clock!

Ethiopia, however, suffers from long periods of drought, which result in widespread famine and disease. It also was engaged in a long civil war with Eritrea, a country on its northern border.

The World Food Crisis has hugely affected the lives of Ethiopians, who struggle daily to provide their families with enough food. With the increase in food prices a greater percentage of their income is being spent on food, which means less income for other needs such as clothing, medicine and water.

Ethiopia is struggling to cope with drought and famine, which has once again hit the country. One of the main coping strategies of farmers when faced with drought is to move to areas where the condition of the pasture is more suitable for the animal feed. But their movements are limited due to the widespread nature of the drought. The main impact of the drought on these communities is the heavy death toll on cattle.

Women are particularly affected by the drought, since there is a clear increase in their chores. They have to

walk long hours to fetch water, or to look for pasture for their weak animals. Malnutrition is also affecting the people. They are also under pressure to ensure that their children have enough food and will often go without themselves if food is scarce.

Trócaire's partners SOS Sahel and AFD have rapidly responded to the drought through an irrigation programme. There is also a clear need to provide help for animals, which are a lifeline for so many Ethiopians. Feeding animals is also an important issue and will increasingly feature as a challenge if grain prices continue to rise and drought persists. However, all these costs have risen considerably as grain in the form of food aid for people and their animals is becoming more and more expensive for Trócaire. It means that Trócaire has to make tough decisions when deciding how to administer aid. Ensuring people have enough to eat is paramount to these decisions.

In Asia, the food crisis is having significant impacts in many of Trócaire's programme countries including India, Cambodia, Burma and Afghanistan. Rice, the staple food of about 2.5 billion Asians, has increased dramatically over recent months. In countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Burma rice provides 50%-80% of the total calories consumed. Asian farmers produce about 90% of the world's total rice crop, in particular India and China who between them produce over half the total crop. China, India and Cambodia, among others, have imposed tariffs and export bans. And although many of the poor in Asia are farmers, due to international market barriers, they cannot benefit from the increased food prices for grains.

Burma



Burma is situated in Southeast Asia, bordered by India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand. Burma has a history of poor governance due to a military regime that refuses to relinquish power. In 1988, wide-scale public demonstrations led to multi-party elections in 1990 in which the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), swept to victory. However, the military regime refused to accept the election result.

To date, the election results have not been upheld. The military regime has sought to weaken the NLD and other opposition groups through intimidation, imprisonment, propaganda, human rights abuses and military offensives.

In August 2007, sharp increases in the cost of living through the removal of subsidies on gas and petrol led to demonstrations throughout Burma. Initially small protests calling for the reinstatement of subsidies, they turned into demonstrations by tens of thousands of Buddhist monks standing in solidarity with the poor and asking for political reforms.



Nan Lun's family adjusts to life in the Karenni Camp

A brutal crackdown on these peaceful demonstrators by government troops and hired thugs was broadcast across the world's media and briefly brought this isolated country into the international spotlight, but four months later, no political progress has been made, Aung San Suu Ky, leader of the NLD, remains under house arrest, military offensives continue against civilians and the arrest and imprisonment of demonstrators remains a weekly occurrence.

Burma was devastated by Cyclone Nargis in May of this year. As a result the food situation is dire in cyclone-affected areas as production and stores of rice and other agricultural produce have been destroyed. To compound the problem, Burma would have a traditional hunger period from May to November.

Trócaire has had to face serious challenges in responding to the crisis because of spiraling rice prices and unfavourable exchange rates. Its partner, TBCC, provides food and shelter to the populations of ten refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. Trócaire has had to increase funding to TBCC in order to cover the costs of this humanitarian work.



An exercise to get you thinking!

Below is a newspaper article by Trócaire's Trade Policy Officer Michael O' Brien, which was published in June 2008 during the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation's summit that was held in Rome to tackle the issue of the World Food Crisis.

This article can be used as a stimulus for a class discussion on the World Food Crisis.

Read the article and answer the questions which follow:

Food prices have been grabbing the headlines in recent months. As prices rise, the competition between food retailers intensifies, with ads screaming '100% Extra Free!' and '3-for-2!' to gain our custom.

Despite the offers, more and more people have to think carefully about where to shop and which brand to pick as the cost of filling our trolleys soars. The recent sharp rise in prices is affecting people everywhere: the impact on poor people being the greatest.

Before the recent spike in the cost of food, the world had been home to 800 million people who on a daily basis have been living in hunger. These are the 'poorest of the poor'. But the recent rises, which are being talked about all around the world, has ignited street riots in at least fourteen developing nations and highlights the need for addressing the causes of hunger once and for all.

The causes are many, and whilst some are well known others are not. Alongside poverty and the neglect of agriculture in many developing countries over several decades, there is rising demand for food as the global population increases and, as incomes grow, tastes change. More people can now afford meat and a wider and larger variety of foods.

Then consider increased costs to farmers due to high fuel and fertiliser prices, competition for land from 'eco-friendly' biofuels and lower crop yields caused by droughts and unpredictable climatic conditions.

Even more factors are the decline of the dollar – the currency in which many foods are priced on global markets – and speculation in food commodity markets.

Trócaire welcomes this week's summit in Rome at which the world's governments will commit to establishing a food fund. Immediate food aid is certainly needed to prevent immediate hunger and fight increased poverty, but addressing the multiple causes of this problem demands careful analysis if appropriate responses are to be found. What combination of policies will be effective over the medium and longer term is the critical question.

Although many poor people require urgent assistance now, in the longer term higher food prices present an opportunity for many of the world's poorest people. Ireland's historic understanding of hunger and poverty encouraged the Government to establish

an Irish Hunger Task Force. The report of the Hunger Task Force is expected to emphasise the need for greater investment in agriculture, targeting poor farmers, many of them women.

In the development of biofuels we need to avoid displacing food crops for our energy needs. Trócaire partners in some semi-arid areas of East Africa are exploring the benefits some biofuels present in generating income and reducing soil degradation.

For developing countries to be able to invest in agriculture and for small producers to really benefit from their labours, international trade rules which ensure fair returns are critical. Even though food prices are rising, are the small producers reaping the returns? Too often trade rules benefit large multinational companies at the expense of local producers.

Just as Irish farmers are concerned about the outcome of the current World Trade Organisation talks, the decisions made in these negotiations are critical to the small producers in the developing world.

It is self-evident that our current model of distributing and trading in food is unjust. In a liberal market system where food is purchased only by those who can afford it, we deny many a basic human right. For this reason, the food crisis is not just an issue of trade, agriculture or markets: but an issue of justice.

Why not discuss the following questions in class or try and answer them yourself!

1. In the first paragraph, the author gives two examples of advertising by food retailers. Can you think of two other examples of this style of advertising?

- (a) _____
- (b) _____

2. (a) In paragraph three, the author uses the term 'developing nations'. What countries do you think he's referring to?

(b) Can you give three examples of 'developing nations'?



3. (a) The author mentions many causes for the World Food Crisis. Can you list four of these causes.



(b) Now try to think hard about one of these causes. How do you think this cause could affect global food levels?

4. In paragraph four the author states, “and, as income grows, tastes change”. Do you think that Irish people’s tastes have changed in the last few years since we have become richer? If so, how?

5. What so you think was the importance of the summit in Rome?

6. The author mentions that higher food prices can assist poor people in the long term. Explain what the author might mean by this statement.



7. Biofuels have been cited as a cause of the World Fuel Crisis. What are biofuels and how, do you think, would they affect world food prices?

8. Why, do you think, fairer trade rules are essential to poor farmers?



9. In the last line the author says it’s, ‘an issue of justice’. Why, do you think, does he say this?

10. Now, imagine that you are a government minister in Ireland. Can you make one suggestion of what the Irish people could do to tackle global hunger?

What do you think?

Aim: To debate issues surrounding the food crisis.

Top Tip: If you haven't used the walking debate before, explain to the students how it will work, before you invite them to stand.

Instructions: Label the room with AGREE and DISAGREE on opposite walls. Invite the students to gather in the middle of the room. Read out a statement without discussing it further and ask students to move to the position they are happy with, which can range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Standing in the middle, for example, suggests that the student does not fully agree or disagree or is undecided. Without talking to one another, ask a few students to express their opinion on the statement. Offer students the chance to adjust their position after some opinions have been given and ask them why they moved. Perhaps for the 2nd or 3rd statement, ask other students why they think their classmate is standing where he/she is.

It is important that students do not talk unless asked, so that opinions are listened to and respected.

You could also invite the students to propose new statements for discussion.

Statements:

People are hungry because they live in hot countries where it doesn't rain.

People are hungry because they live in countries with corrupt governments.

Tropical countries need to grow more food for world consumption.

More bio fuels need to be grown for our energy consumption, so that we aren't so dependent on oil.

We need to grow our own food, instead of relying on the world market to satisfy our taste buds.

World Food Crisis

A Divided World

Aim: That young people will understand how the worlds' food is divided globally and how this inequality impacts on people's rights.

Time: 30 minutes

You need: Paper and pens. 30 bananas to represent food.

Instructions:

- Around the room stick up 7 sheets of paper with one of the countries/ continents below written on each sheet.
- Explain that the group represent all of the millions of people living in the world. Ask three volunteers to guess how many people should stand beside the various sheets and to divide the group accordingly.
- Now divide the group according the figures in the next page, which reflect the relative break down of the world's population.
- The leader now displays the food divided into 30 pieces and explains that this represents all the food in the world. Each country/ continent group must now decide how much of the worlds food, i.e. how many of the 30 bananas their country/ continent gets in reality.
- They then feed back their guess to the whole group.
- Now the real division is make as indicated below, e.g. China gets 4 bananas, Asia gets 1 and a half bananas, and so on.

Discussion suggestions:

- Think about the way food is divided globally. Do you think this is fair?
- Do people have the right to food? What if they can't afford it?
- Who is responsible for ensuring this right?
- If you didn't have enough food, how would this affect you?

This game is sourced from 'The Rights Stuff!', an education resource on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child 1998. Therefore although the figures below may not be an accurate reflection of the current statistics, the inequity in food distribution continues to be a recurrent theme.

Country	World populations (for a group of 30)	World populations (for a group of 20)	The number of bananas for each group
China	10	7	4
Asia	7	5	1 ½
Russia	3	2	5 ½
Europe	3	2	8 ½
Africa	3	2	½
North America	2	1	8 ½
South America	2	2	1 ½